

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS OBSERVED IN THE OMO RIVER VALLEY,
SW ETHIOPIA, DURING OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 1984

Observations of the Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, the Sprosser *Luscinia luscinia* and some other migrant passerines have shown that these species migrate from Europe to SE Africa from Kenya southwards, taking about 5 months for the journey. The migration route of many of these birds seems to lie across the Red Sea coast, and through Ethiopia and central and SE Kenya (see e.g. Pearson & Backhurst 1976, Nikolaus 1983). The main Sudan immigration is during August-September, but birds reach Kenya only during November and December. The routes followed by these birds through Ethiopia and their main areas of stopover during September, October and November are still poorly known. Birds moving south from the Red Sea could reach central Kenya either via the Ethiopian rift valley or through the Western Ethiopian highlands. In the case of the Marsh Warbler in particular, the importance of Western Ethiopia as an autumn stopover area has been suggested (Dowsett-Lemaire 1979, Nikolaus & Pearson 1982). Migration from W Ethiopia to central Ethiopia could involve heavy autumn movements as far west as the Omo River, and since I had the opportunity of participating in an ecological survey along this river from 5 October to 24 November 1984, I made a point of recording and searching carefully for Palaearctic migrants. The river section travelled was from Gibe Bridge (8:13 N, 37:35 E) to Carro (5:40 N, 35:50 E). The upper part of this was in the W highlands; the lower part through semi-arid grasslands to Lake Turkana. Mist nets (usually totalling about 72 m) were used on twelve of the 51 expedition days, usually sited along hippotamus trails within 10 km of the river.

Of the 54 birds caught only three were Palaearctic migrants, a Sprosser on 6 October at 8:13 N, 37:35 E and a Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and a Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* on 16 November at 5:50 N, 35:38 E. No migrant warblers, shrikes, flycatchers or nightingales were observed on walks of about 15 km into the highlands to the west and east of the river, or in the riverside vegetation. Apart from Common Sandpipers *Actitis hypoleucos*, which were abundant along the whole river, and small numbers of Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and Marsh Sandpipers *T. stagnatilis*, the only Palaearctic birds seen were a single Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, a lone Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii* at 6:40 N, 37:52 E, two flocks of Eurasian Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* in the W highlands during the first week of October, single White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* and Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* at about 6 degrees N, and migrating birds of prey. On 21 and 23 October, large flocks of birds of prey crossed the river at 37 N, 37:11 E. As well as 100 Tawny Eagles *Aquila rapax*, 50 Greater or Lesser Spotted Eagles *A. clanga/pomarina* and 7 possible Long-legged Buzzards *Buteo rufinus* were seen soaring on thermals and moving south.

The seeming lack of Palaearctic migrant passerines along the Omo River would imply that the main migration route from Ethiopian stop-over areas to central Kenya must lie elsewhere, presumably further east. If heavy movement were taking place overhead, appreciable numbers of birds would be expected to come to ground in the attractive cover along the river. The search for migration routes used by Palaearctic passerines across Ethiopia remains an inviting challenge. Further surveys should perhaps be conducted in Sidamo, Ilbabar and Kefa Provinces and in the rift valley.

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A SECOND RECORD OF JOUANIN'S PETREL *BULWERIA FALLAX* FROM KENYA

On 9 December 1985 my young son and friends rescued an all-dark, medium-sized petrel from the attentions of a dog on the beach fronting the Driftwood Club, Malindi, Kenya (3:13 S, 40:07 E). The bird, although docile in the hand, appeared reasonably lively, so measurements and photographs were taken quickly before releasing it. The usual problems associated with the identification of petrels in the field were, in this case, compounded by the close interest shown by a topless Italian woman who commanded my attention with her questions.